



Anti-Bullying Bill Becomes Law

**Public Act Speeds School Response, Expands Staff Training,
Makes All School Employees Mandated Reporters of Bullying,
Addresses Cyberbullying & Launches Statewide School Climate Assessments**

July 21, 2011

Public Act 11-232, *An Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws*, was signed into law by Governor Dannel Malloy on July 13. The Connecticut General Assembly unanimously approved the legislation.

The new law takes comprehensive steps to prevent bullying and ensure every child the right to learn in public school without fear of teasing, humiliation or assault. At the Connecticut Commission on Children's November 2010 forum on bullying in schools, more than 500 people heard Kevin Jennings of the U.S. Department of Education recommend that every school do the following: (1) adopt a clear policy against bullying behaviors; (2) train all school staff who interact with students on how to prevent bullying; (3) ensure that all school staff take immediate action whenever they observe bullying or receive a report; and (4) gather data to assess the extent of bullying in the school. The new law requires all of these steps.

The law responds to alarming evidence that bullying impedes Connecticut students' ability to succeed in school. Fully 25 percent of Connecticut high school students – and 35 percent of the state's 9th graders – report having been bullied or harassed on school property in the previous year. According to the Connecticut School Health Survey, Connecticut high school students who report being bullied are more likely to get less sleep, miss school because they feel unsafe, feel depressed, attempt suicide, have property stolen at school, carry a weapon to school and experience dating violence. More than 900,000 U.S. high school students reported being cyberbullied in one year. Elementary and middle school children also experience bullying.

Public Act 11-232 takes the following steps to reduce the incidence of student bullying:

- All school employees, including bus drivers and cafeteria staff, must receive annual training on how to prevent and respond to student bullying and suicide. All teaching candidates and beginning teachers must also receive training.
- School employees must report acts of student bullying to school officials. They have one day to submit oral reports, three days to submit written ones.
- When schools receive reports of bullying, they must investigate them promptly. Parents of the children involved must be notified of the school's response within 48 hours after the investigation's completion.
- Each school district will appoint a safe school climate coordinator to help individual schools implement the district's safe school climate plan.

- Schools must respond to bullying whether it occurs at school, online, on a school bus, at a bus stop, at a school-related activity or elsewhere. (Schools will respond to bullying outside the school setting if it creates a hostile environment at school for the bullied student, infringes on the rights of the student at school, or substantially disrupts the student's education or the orderly operation of a school.)
- Each school will designate a safe school climate committee to identify and address bullying patterns in the school, review bullying reports and school policies, advise the school district on its safe school climate plan, and educate the school community on issues related to bullying.
- The state Department of Education (SDE) will prepare a list of evidence-based models, which schools can use for implementing strategies to reduce bullying and establish safe school climates.
- All schools will complete biennial assessments of their school climates, with the assistance of SDE, and will report the assessment results to SDE.
- Schools continue to be required to establish and implement a written prevention and intervention strategy. School climate assessments will monitor progress in this area.
- The definition of “bullying” is amended to (1) add cyberbullying, (2) clarify what constitutes bullying, and (3) eliminate the "during the school year" phrase in the current definition that reportedly caused some school officials to “wipe the slate clean” and ignore bullying patterns that began before the current school year. The new bullying definition includes enumerated categories to clarify that bullying includes acts based on actual or perceived characteristics of students.
- A statewide safe school resource network will connect schools to information, training opportunities and resource materials to improve school climate and diminish bullying.
- SDE will monitor districts' prevention and intervention strategies and progress, and will report biennially to the state legislature on the effectiveness of school responses.

S.B. 1138: Timeline for Action

When bullying is witnessed by or reported to any school employee –

Within 1 school day – School employee makes oral report to school climate specialist

Within 3 school days – School employee makes written report to school climate specialist

Promptly after receiving report – School climate specialist completes investigation

Within 48 hours after investigation – Parents notified of school response & consequences

Annually – Each school employee completes annual or in-service training on bullying prevention

By Jan. 1, 2012 – Each school board approves safe school climate plan

By 30 days after school board adopts plan – District plan is posted on board & school websites

By July 1, 2012 – Each school establishes or designates a safe school climate committee

By July 1, 2012 – Superintendent appoints safe school climate coordinator to implement plan

By July 1, 2012 & annually thereafter – Each school employee receives copy of district plan

Twice a year – Specialists meet with district safe school coordinator to recommend plan changes

Every two years starting Feb. 2012 – SDE report: recommendations, analysis of district responses

Every two years starting July 2012 – Each school carries out school climate assessment

Ongoing – All beginning teachers and teacher candidates receive bullying prevention instruction

Ongoing – School climate resource network makes training opportunities available to schools

***For more information, contact the Connecticut Commission on Children at
www.cga.ct.gov/coc or 860/240-0290.***